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Everyone's all Atwitter:

***The Promise and Peril of
Social Media***

A Little About Me

- ▶ Unpronouncable name
- ▶ Originally from Istanbul, Turkey
- ▶ Assistant Professor of Sociology at UMBC
- ▶ I study how technology interacts with society
 - Sociality
 - Surveillance/Privacy
 - Inequality

On Being Human



Social Species

- Solitary human
- The Rational Individual
- The Embedded Human

Come to Marlboro Country.

You get a lot to like
with a Marlboro.



14 mg "tar," 1.2 mg nicotine av. per cigarette, FTC method.

Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined
That Cigarette Smoking Is Dangerous to Your Health.





Living in Among Larger Aggregations

- ▶ We still live in small groups
- ▶ Embedded in much larger groups
 - Primary / secondary social groups

Living in Groups

- ▶ Sociality
- ▶ Status / Reciprocity
- ▶ Language
- ▶ Social standing is essential to survival

Living in Among Larger Aggregations

- ▶ Technology as an extension of our senses (Marshall McLuhan)
- ▶ Social media: extension of the neocortex? (Robin Dunbar)

Technology and Sociality



Telephone!

- ▶ the residential telephone service ... [saves] time, labor, and drudgery, and in making the whole household run more smoothly. It is always on duty, shops in all weather, corrects mistakes, and hastens deliveries. It save letter writing, orders the dinner, invites the guests, reserves the tickets, and calls the carriage. It makes appointments, changes the time, cancels them altogether and renews them. It calls the expressman, calls the cab, and instructs the office. It invites one's friends, asks them to stay away, asks them to hurry and enables them to invite in return ... " (Fischer, '92, p.67)

Minitel!

“We had assumed people might use Minitel just for administrative business - paying bills and so on. In fact, people developed all sorts of surprising ways of getting the most out of the system.”

Christian Grezes, Minitel's Marketing Director.

Internet!

- ▶ Early on, informational and economic uses were emphasized
- ▶ People ruined the plan
- ▶ Again!
- ▶ Internet appropriated into the social fabric
... Except the fabric of the Internet is drastically different than the physical world

Social Media

- ▶ Most used applications on the Internet
- ▶ Main reason most people use the Internet
- ▶ Especially popular among young people
- ▶ Moving to mobile environments

Social Norms



Social Norms

- ▶ Depend on laws of physics!
- ▶ Visibility, reach, persistence, accessibility all matter!
- ▶ And all depend on the qualities of the medium of communication

In the Physical World

- ▶ Time rolls on and on
 - Thus, speech is ephemeral
- ▶ Space has structure
 - Need to move through it
 - Can't just jump FTL with your hyperdrive
 - Sorry!
- ▶ Boundaries / Walls / Doors

On the Internet

- ▶ Time stretches
 - Thus, speech is forever
- ▶ Space collapses
 - Can jump from place to place instantaneously
 - Sorry!
- ▶ Boundaries / Walls / Doors

The Fabric of the Internet

- ▶ Ephemeral becomes persistent
- ▶ “Practically Hidden” becomes searchable
- ▶ Duplication is effortless / costless
- ▶ Traversable (links, nodes, hypertext)
- ▶ Boundaries, walls, reach are all different

Optics / Visibility

- For example, in many sites (Facebook) Two way visibility becomes Enhanced One-Way Visibility.



Not necessarily true!

Consequences

- ▶ Collapse of audiences (who would ordinarily be separated by physical space)
- ▶ Mixing of streams of information from very different sources (friends, family, corporations, institutions)
- ▶ No direct analogy to walls/boundaries

Consequences

- ▶ Persistence of messages
- ▶ Abundance of messages / information
- ▶ Attention as the limited commodity

Private / Public Implosion

► Historically:

- Private is intimate and less (in)visible
- Private is ephemeral
- Public is civic and visible
- Public is persistent

Private / Public Implosion

► Currently

- Private is intimate and somewhat visible
- Public can also be intimate – one-to-one
- Public can also be civic
- Civic can also be intimate
- Both Public and Private are Intimate

Institutional Identity

- ▶ Who are you?
 - Person?
 - Institution?
- ▶ Is this a “we” or an “I”?
- ▶ Is there a voice?
- ▶ Is it interactive? Just announcements?

Be Prepared

- ▶ To engage
- ▶ To take “flak”
- ▶ Community building is not the same as marketing
- ▶ Why should people care about the issues?
- ▶ Why should people care about you?

Facebook

- ▶ Activity mostly among primary group
- ▶ Most interactions are with people with whom we interact in the physical world
- ▶ Facebook fan pages act bumper stickers (identity markers)

Twitter

- ▶ Tends to be secondary social groups
- ▶ Ambient awareness
- ▶ Announcements
- ▶ Celebrity – classic broadcast
- ▶ Collaborative filtering / curation
- ▶ Banter
- ▶ Tweckle!

Some Nasa Topics

- ▶ Space! Cool pictures!
- ▶ Science / Technology
- ▶ Disaster relief / information
- ▶ Weather (Snomaggedon!)
- ▶ Climate
 - ... change

Handling Controversy

- ▶ Not easy – not to be underestimated
- ▶ Avoid becoming a party
- ▶ Information
- ▶ Limits

Questions?

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Thank you!